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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 January 1957

STAFF MEMO: 1-57

SUBJECT: : Forces of Ferment in the USSR

1. It has been generally assumed in our estimates and elsewhere that Soviet society and policy are in at least the first stages of important evolutionary transformations, and that these are the natural consequence of certain practical developments such as: the emergence of a technical and managerial bureaucracy with diminished interest in international adventurism, the enhanced prestige of the professional military as a sober and stabilizing force, the liberalizing influence of education, realization of the destructive power of atomic weapons, and the general desire to settle down and reconstitute the USSR's international relations on a more "business-like" basis.

2. While these factors are of great importance, and, in many quarters, insufficiently appreciated, there are other more elusive and peculiarly Russian forces at work which it is particularly important to bear in mind in connection with recent signs of discontent in the USSR.* There is a natural reluctance to include broad psychological and ideological factors within the purview of intelligence estimates since such factors are difficult to define and even more difficult to measure. However, to neglect them can lead to very serious errors in judging probable Russian behavior. Dostoevsky, who understood ideological and psychological forces, wrote a better "estimate" of the future of Russian society than any statesman or economist of his day. This memorandum discusses two factors -- the special role of the "intelligentsia" in Russia and the phenomenon of Great-Russian chauvinism -- which may prove to be the most important of all the imponderables on the Russian scene today.

THE LEADERSHIP OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

3. If one thing is clear in the current unrest and discontent in the USSR, it is the leading role played -- as it was in Poland and Hungary -- by writers and students. Ever since mid-1953 the writers have been pressuring

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the regime for greater liberties and, both in their writings and in professional meetings, trying to undermine the authority of party administrators. After numerous attempts to define and hold a new line, the regime has been confronted in the last few months with several blunt attacks on the validity of the long sacred doctrine of "Socialist Realism" as an ideology for the artist. Since the denigration of Stalin and particularly since the uprisings in Eastern Europe, this older generation of disaffected intellectuals has been joined by at least some elements of the student population. Student insubordination has been widely reported in the Soviet press during the past few weeks, and there have been eye-witness reports of student meetings at which spontaneous and almost universal disapproval of the official line has been manifested. Large numbers are known to have walked out of several meetings in protest at the official line on Hungary. The Moscow University newspaper admitted to 200 recent expulsions "for failure to meet the study plan and poor discipline," and there have been reports of expulsions elsewhere.

4. The student phase of the protest movement may prove to be the more drastic challenge to the regime. Indeed, it was the older intellectual, Dudintsev, who found himself in the unfamiliar position of counselling moderation at a riotous student meeting of 2 November when his new book, "Not by Bread Alone," was discussed. Although the current student generation has had its ~~whole~~ experience under the Soviet regime, it is precisely these people who appear to be offering the most fundamental challenges to the regime — in such developments as the resolution unanimously adopted by a Komsomol unit of Moscow University calling for more equal distribution of income in the USSR, broader information in the Soviet press, and the publication of statistics on living standards outside the USSR; and in the reported publication of numerous illegal handbill-type newspapers in the universities.

5. While these signs of unrest do not necessarily have immediate political importance, they almost certainly have serious political implications. There is no precedent for such manifestations in Soviet society since the early twenties. While our only firm information is from Moscow, it is safe to assume — in view of the widespread discussion of this problem in the provincial press (including reported expulsion of students as far afield as the Primorsky Krai) — that these phenomena are considerably more widespread. Demunciation of "rotten moods," "anarchism," and "nihilism" among students has been perhaps the most publicized domestic issue in the Soviet press during the past few weeks; and reports of "demagogic" attacks on party figures have been printed in the provincial as well as the central press.

6. [redacted] the intellectuals have sustained their sense of identity to a surprising degree, speaking naturally and

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25X1 unconsciously of "we" as a different world from "them" (the party and government functionaries)

students no longer ask it, but when and how Russia went wrong in its social development; they tend to meet in small "circles," are deeply concerned with rediscovering some basis for individual integrity, and — although largely indifferent to religion — find Dostoevsky the most satisfying of all Russian writers to read.

7. The revival of Dostoevsky, which has been a striking development during the past year, is only a part of the general re-examination of the Russian past and the Russian heritage which has been opened up in the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress. An interesting example of drawing from earlier Russian tradition may lie in the report that the illegal newspaper at the University took the format and the title of Herzen's Bell, Russia's first illegal emigre journal which appeared almost exactly a century ago. Another curious throwback to the past is the interest in Polish developments among Russian intellectuals, who now reportedly buy up and discuss heterodox Polish publications within a few hours of their appearance on Soviet bookstands. The Russian intelligentsia has always had a deep feeling of guilt towards and identification with the Poles, and was prompted to form its first effective revolutionary organization in the 1860's largely by the repression of the Polish uprising of 1863.

8. The above examples suggest that the recent profusion of intellectual discontent in the USSR may represent to a considerable degree the reappearance of an old Russian tradition, that of the radical intelligentsia. "Intelligentsia" is a Russian word; and the inclusion of the "intelligentsia" as a class alongside the workers and peasants as leaders of "progressive humanity" is a purely Russian emendation to Marxist philosophy. Intelligentsia, in the traditional Russian understanding of the word, does not just mean "intellectuals" in the narrower Western sense; nor does it mean only those who live by or engage in conceptual thought rather than practical activity. The intelligentsia as a coherent and self-conscious class in modern Russian history derived its unity from the sense of a common search for truth — what the most influential nineteenth century radical called "the two-sided truth — objective, scientific truth, and subjective moral truth."

9. This thirst for absolute truth and a concomitant hatred of pettiness, cant, and bureaucracy (all subsumed under the supreme term of recrimination in nineteenth century Russia, meshchanstvo) was the result of Russia's primitive religious and philosophical traditions, which had undergone little leavening by the more definition-conscious traditions of Latin thought, let alone the common sense of Aristotle. This Eastern, Platonic fascination with absolute truth (pravda) continued to hold great sway over Russian thought even when

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religion was left behind. Stalin and Molotov were educated in seminaries; and, when Lenin was casting about for an appealing slogan for his own journal in the early twentieth century he called it not "Unity," "Humanity," or "The Daily Worker", but Truth. The quarrel of the intelligentsia with Lenin-Stalin-Molotov today is essentially no different from that between the intelligentsia and the priestly ideologists of the Tsarist regime a century ago: outrage that the regime lays claim to "truth", yet is hopelessly mired in pettiness and bureaucracy. Then, as now, the 'intelligents' appear to consider the only real contending forces to be themselves vs. virtually everyone in authority -- "we" vs. "they". It is significant that Dudintsev's term of abuse for the Soviet system is "meshchansky communism."

10. Thus, it may not be too much to say that one of the first key prerequisites for a revolutionary situation is coming into being in the USSR: the alienation of the intellectual elite. Although few of the other prerequisites appear to be satisfied, this "trahison des clercs" in the Soviet system should be seen as a serious failure of the regime, and not just as a case of hothouse academic controversy or "the Soviets' version of panty raids." The post-Stalin leaders apparently made the mistake of assuming -- as Stalin never did -- that the Soviet system was inherently stable, and that -- unlike the regimes of Alexander I, Alexander II, and Nicholas II -- it would not be fundamentally disturbed by liberalizing measures. Seeking to reintroduce vitality and productivity to Soviet life, the post-Stalin leadership has given new status and opportunities to the intellectuals, and the intellectuals have apparently chosen to become once more an "intelligentsia."

11. A disaffected intelligentsia living within an absolutist state has been, historically, almost impossible to conciliate with piecemeal reforms. It is interesting to remember that there was far greater unrest among the intelligentsia in Russia after the great reforms of Alexander II in the 1860's than there had been before. There is, of course, no way of knowing with certainty that an intelligentsia in the old sense can or will reemerge as a determining factor under the very different conditions of the Soviet system and twentieth century technocratic civilization in general. But, if the intelligentsia proves as vigorous and determined as is here suggested it may become, the Soviet leadership will probably feel under increasing pressure to resort to some new form of ideological intimidation, if not outright terror.

the Soviet intelligentsia has become apprehensive and hesitant to talk with foreigners. The appointment of Molotov as cultural tsar and the introduction of a new law permitting arbitrary arrest for loosely-defined acts of "hooliganism" may be the first foray into a program of renewed oppression of this recalcitrant class.

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GREAT-RUSSIAN CHAUVINISM

12. A second element that has appeared in the current wave of unrest is the apparent disaffection among some of the national minorities in the USSR. The first outbreak after the denigration of Stalin was the rioting in Georgia; and it now appears -- from the growing volume of rumors on the subject -- that a large-scale demonstration was probably held in Kaunas, Lithuania, early in November. On 5 December the Chairman of the Presidium of the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet made a surprisingly alarmed and defensive speech, warning of the extreme dangers of Fascist provocations. A speech four days later by the party first secretary admitted in only slightly more composed language that Hungarian developments "had emboldened reactionaries" and that some groups by "idealizing bourgeois times were thus implanting incorrect views, especially among youth." On 8 December, the Belorussian provincial paper spoke in unusually strong terms of the need to "give a decisive rebuff to those who sow distrust in the bases of our Soviet society;" and at about the same time rumors began to circulate of some desertions by Ukrainian soldiers, of guerilla action in the Carpathian region of the Ukraine, and even of unusual security precautions and some fighting in Kiev. While there has been no confirmation of these rumors, some indications of possible disruption in the region may be found in (1) the irregularity of rail traffic into Czechoslovakia

explaining delays in rodcer deliveries by "agricultural sabotage and strikes" in Odessa and elsewhere.

13. Like the disaffection of the intelligentsia, the actual extent of minority unrest is not as important as the fact of its recurrence along classical lines: i.e. the apparent sense of identification of some of the subject minorities of the USSR with the fate of the more recently subjugated peoples on the fringe of the empire.* It must be remembered that areas like Lithuania and even the Ukraine and Georgia have histories, cultures, and languages as ancient and distinct as those of many of the present states of Eastern Europe. The widespread assumption that the impulse for betterment in these parts of the USSR (as distinct from the satellites) would not link itself to national separatist slogans has perhaps been based on a too-uncritical acceptance of Soviet claims to have overcome this deep and traditional source of difficulty.

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14. These disaffected nationalist elements in the USSR do not in all probability have either the strength or cohesion to represent a serious threat to the Soviet regime. The major effect of their renewed vigor at this time may be merely to aggravate and perhaps stimulate to new violence one of the deepest and least understood impulses in Soviet society, that of Great-Russian chauvinism.

15. Great-Russian chauvinism was one of the most-powerful driving forces of the Stalin regime; and it is one aspect of Stalin's approach to which Khrushchev in particular has reverted on a number of occasions. In one of Lenin's last indictments of Stalin, he described this attitude as that of "that very generically Russian man, the Great Russian, the chauvinist, actually a villain and a ravisher, who is the typical Russian bureaucrat." Lenin spoke of "the contempt with which we treated non-Russians: a Pole is always a 'Polak', a Tartar is sarcastically called a 'count', a Ukrainian a 'Khokhol', a Georgian and other Caucasian nationals a 'Caucasian man'." He voiced fear that these minorities "will drown in this chauvinistic sea of Great Russian rascality like a fly in milk."*

16. Actually this chauvinism is part of a defense mechanism long used to overcome a deep insecurity in the Russian make-up. This isolation and uncertainty of self is basically caused by (1) the long series of foreign invasions that Russia has endured — by the Teutonic knights, the Mongols, the Poles, the Swedes, the Lithuanians, the French, and the Germans; and (2) a sense of Russia's lack of a broad cultural base and a kind of grudging peasant hatred of the more clever and refined peoples, such as the Jews, Georgians, and Armenians within the USSR, and the British, Germans and most Western diplomats without.

17. The violent reaction of Soviet leaders to any forcible challenge to their position and their extreme sensitivity to any accusation of being "uncultured" or "barbaric" are part of the same basic insecurity which lies deep in the Russian consciousness. It is important to realize that crude threats and menacing gestures, although they may not be without substance, are probably basically the result not so much of calculation as of this basic insecurity which Russian leaders have traditionally felt — and none more strongly than the current crop which seems at times to be vacillating uneasily between cruel threats and childish delight at being accepted personally in once-hostile circles abroad. Many of Khrushchev's attitudes — his anti-Semitism, use of crude threats, and insulting language — reflect this defense mechanism. His shows of rudeness and stridency may shock many; but, like Vyshinsky's activities at the UN, Khrushchev's approach (not necessarily his policies) probably appeals to many Great Russians.

* A constantly recurring metaphor in Russian History — most recently used by Zhukov at a Moscow reception when he told a Western diplomat that the USSR could have crushed the Poles "like flies" if it had so desired.

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POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS **CONFIDENTIAL**

18. The forces discussed above - unlike most of the practical pressures referred to at the outset - cut across class and economic boundaries. Thus, the probable outcome in terms of Soviet society cannot be charted solely on the basis of which classes will emerge as the most influential. The new technical and managerial elite, for instance, will be subject to both impulses and will probably not react as a unified class. Much will depend on the balance of allegiance that is struck by two important groups which have not yet become politically articulate: the professional military and the poorer workers and peasantry.

19. The privileged officer class - which seems destined to have increasing political influence as the ultimate basis for power in a regime with a devalued secret police - has traditionally been responsive to chauvinistic appeals. The added privileges they have been accorded by the post-Stalin leadership may also serve to dissuade them from radical ideas, but cannot guarantee them against infection with the intelligentsia's revolutionary desires.

20. The peasantry and lower levels of the proletariat, whose classical resentment of central authority has often been siphoned off by wars, pogroms, etc., have also been traditionally amenable to chauvinistic pressures. However, the possibility remains of an alliance between the intelligentsia and important elements in either of these groups. Ambassador Bohlen has observed that "the fusion of the workers' grievances with the discontent of the intelligentsia is, I am sure, in Bolshevik eyes, the chief warning which they would see in developments in Eastern Europe." Thus, among the most important questions for determining the real significance of the current unrest in the USSR may well be (1) Which and how many people will become affected by the movement within the intelligentsia? and (2) Will the Soviet leadership, confronted by the disaffection of the intelligentsia and nationalist revolts in the Satellite empire echoed to some extent in the USSR's own national minorities, resort to chauvinist slogans and perhaps adventurist policies to overcome these dangers?

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